

༄༅། །ཤེས་ཐོན་ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ།

The Samantabhadra Perfection of Wisdom

Samantabhadraprajñāpāramitā

འཕགས་པ་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་པ་རོལ་དུ་བྱིན་པ་ཀུན་དུ་བཟང་པོ་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོའི་མདོ།

'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa kun tu bzang po theg pa chen po'i mdo

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra “The Samantabhadra Perfection of Wisdom”

Āryaprajñāpāramitāsamantabhadramahāyānasūtra



Toh 28
Degé Kangyur, vol. 34 (sher phyin, ka), folios 177.b–178.a

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co.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Translation
 - 1. The Samantabhadra Perfection of Wisdom
- ab. Abbreviations
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
 - Source Texts—Tibetan
 - Secondary References—Tibetan
 - Secondary References——Chinese
 - Translations and References—Western Languages
- g. Glossary

s.

SUMMARY

- s.1 In a retreat place in Magadha, the Buddha Śākyamuni and the bodhisattva Samantabhadra, surrounded by many bodhisattvas, perform miracles in a meditative absorption. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra asks the Buddha to distinguish between two levels of the perfection of wisdom. In response, the Buddha gives definitions of these two levels. This sūtra is one of the short prajñāpāramitā sūtras, and it belongs especially to the category related to the five bodhisattvas: Sūryagarbha, Candragarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, and Vajraketu. Despite its brevity, it echoes other sūtras that feature the figure of Samantabhadra and the distinguishing of two types of wisdom.

ac.

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ac.1 Translated by the Nyimé Translation Committee. Paul Baffier produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Grégoire Langouët helped with preparatory research work, compared the draft translation with the Tibetan, and reviewed the final draft. Philippe Cornu reviewed the fundamental points of the text and provided materials, references, and support.

ac.2 This translation has been completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

The Samantabhadra Perfection of Wisdom is a brief Mahāyāna sūtra that is included among the twenty-three prajñāpāramitā sūtras. It is one of five prajñāpāramitā sūtras associated with five bodhisattva figures: Sūryagarbha, Candragarbha, Samantabhadra, Vajrapāṇi, and Vajraketu. The five sūtras are found in all Kangyurs, whether of Tshalpa, Themphangma, or mixed lineage. They are all short, “unpretentious treatises” (Conze) whose originals are variously dated from the sixth century CE to the seventh or eighth.¹

i.2

There are no extant Sanskrit versions or translations in the Chinese canon for any of the works in this group of five sūtras; they are preserved only in Tibetan. There are no colophons and so the Tibetan translators are unknown. None of these texts are listed in the two extant ninth-century inventories, the Denkarma and Pangthangma, and they do not appear in a list of translations by Yeshé Dé.² *The Candragarbha Perfection of Wisdom* (Toh 27)³ is the only one mentioned in the thirteenth-century inventory of Chomden Rigpai Raltri.⁴ Some decades later, all five were included in the fourteenth-century list of canonical translations in Butön’s *History*. Butön notes that the five are not included in the traditional list of six “mother” and eleven “child” prajñāpāramitā sūtras.⁵

i.3

The two main features of this particular sūtra are the key point it makes about wisdom and its link to the bodhisattva Samantabhadra. The first key point concerns the distinction between two levels of wisdom (*prajñā*). It elucidates what resembles wisdom and what actually is wisdom. What actually is wisdom arises only on the first bodhisattva ground as a direct experience, and the unstated implication behind the term “what resembles wisdom” is that until that point it can only be a conceptual image of true wisdom. A very similar distinction between “contaminated and uncontaminated” types of the perfection of wisdom is made in *The Candragarbha Perfection of Wisdom*. The Buddha explains contaminated wisdom as dualistic and pertaining to the stage of devoted conduct, and

uncontaminated wisdom as arising on the path of seeing (the equivalent of the first ground, as mentioned in the present text).⁶ Here, however, “contamination” as such is not mentioned.

i.4 The second main feature of the sūtra is its link to the bodhisattva Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra is an interlocutor in many Mahāyāna sūtras and is included in the group of important bodhisattvas known as the “eight great sons.” He does not appear at all in the long prajñāpāramitā sūtras. However, he does play a major role in the sūtras of the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* family. The present text echoes two passages in the final chapter of *The Stem Array* (*Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, Toh 44-45), which is focused particularly on the figure of Samantabhadra. First, where our text says “all of them remained in the conduct of having mastered Samantabhadra’s aspiration,” this is a reference to the aspiration that Samantabhadra describes in that final chapter and then sets out in his celebrated “Prayer for Good Conduct” (*Bhadracarī-praṇidhāna*, *bzang spyod smon lam*).⁷ Second, the mention of Samantabhadra’s meditative stability causing world systems and buddhafi elds to shake echoes this passage in that final chapter: “Some, through thinking of me, become ripened in one day... Some become ripened through seeing my light, some through seeing the light rays I radiate, some through the realm shaking, some through the manifestation of my form body, and some through rejoicing in it.”⁸

i.5 We have based our work on the Degé xylograph and consulted the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) of the Kangyur, the Hemis Monastery manuscript, and the Shey Palace manuscript. The differences between the manuscripts slightly impact their interpretation, as is reflected in the two previous translations of this sūtra into Western languages. For his English translation, Edward Conze (1973) based his work on the Narthang Kangyur, while George Driessens refers in his French translation (1996) to the Degé Kangyur. A recent translation into Chinese has been published online by the Kumarajiva Project.⁹

The Noble Mahāyāna Sūtra
The Samantabhadra Perfection of Wisdom

1.

The Translation

[F.177.b]

1.1 Homage to all buddhas and bodhisattvas!

Thus did I hear at one time. The Blessed One was dwelling in the country of Magadha in a solitary place,¹⁰ the essence of Dharma,¹¹ [F.178.a] accompanied by bodhisattvas who had gathered there from limitless, countless buddhafiels in the ten directions and were as numerous as the minute particles of those buddhafiels.¹² All of them maintained the conduct of having mastered Samantabhadra's aspiration.

1.2 Then the bodhisattva Samantabhadra entered¹³ the meditative stability called *the display of the nonconceptuality of all phenomena*.¹⁴ Through the power of that meditative stability, world systems as numerous as the minute particles of buddhafiels were all shaken. The Blessed One then touched the bodhisattva Samantabhadra's head with his hand, and through that touch all the buddhafiels, too, were shaken. The gods praised him with a harmonious verse:

1.3 "Light of the world, beyond compare among gods and humans,¹⁵
Your qualities perfect like an ocean,
You liberate beings from the ocean of becoming.¹⁶
Guide, we pray that you protect us!"

1.4 Then the bodhisattva Samantabhadra asked the Blessed One, "Blessed One, how should we train in the goal of training that resembles wisdom, and that which *is* wisdom?"¹⁷

1.5 The Blessed One replied, "Samantabhadra, that which resembles wisdom is the wisdom of those traveling the worldly path of accumulation. That which *is* wisdom is the wisdom of the first ground onward."

1.6 When the Blessed One had spoken these words, the bodhisattva Samantabhadra and the whole world with its gods and humans rejoiced and praised what the Blessed One had said.

1.7 *This completes “The Noble Samantabhadra Mahāyāna Sūtra.”*^{[18](#)}

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

- C* Choné (co ne) Kangyur
- D* Degé (sde dge) Kangyur
- H* Lhasa (zhol) Kangyur
- He* Hemis Kangyur
- J* Lithang ('jang sa tham) Kangyur
- K_Y* Peking Yongle (g.yung lo) Kangyur
- N* Narthang (snar thang) Kangyur
- Z* Shey Kangyur

n.

NOTES

- n.1 Cornu (2006) says sixth to seventh century; Conze (1973) places them in the “tantric period” between 600 and 1200 CE.
- n.2 Sherab Rhaldi (2002).
- n.3 Indo-Tibetan Studies Translation Group, Visva-Bharati, trans., *The Candragarbha Perfection of Wisdom* (<http://read.84000.co/translation/toh27.html>), Toh 27 (84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, 2023).
- n.4 Chomden Rigpai Raltri, F.7.b; see also Schaeffer and van de Kuip 3.14, p. 117.
- n.5 Butön, F.146.a.7–146.b.2.
- n.6 See *The Perfection of Wisdom for Candragarbha*, Toh 27 (F.177.a).
- n.7 See *The Stem Array*, Toh 44–45, [56.49–57](#) and [56.72–133](#) (Roberts 2021).
- n.8 See *The Stem Array*, Toh 44–45, [56.62](#) (Roberts 2021).
- n.9 https://www.ymfz.org/library/kangyur_translated/toh0028/
(https://www.ymfz.org/library/kangyur_translated/toh0028/)
- n.10 H: *ma ga dha'i dgon pa*; Z: *ma ga dha dgon par*; N: *ma ga ta dgon par*; D, J, He: *ma ga dha dgon pa*; K_Y: *ma ga ta dgon pa*.
- n.11 The sequence of phrases describing the place, places, or states in which the Blessed One was staying could be interpreted in several different ways. Conze translates this as “in a remote forest called the ‘Pith of Dharma,’ ” and Driessens as “at the hermitage Essence of the Doctrine” (translated from French). We have chosen to translate *chos kyi snying po* (as in D and J, but *chos kyi snying por* in Z and N) as *the essence of Dharma* but *the essence of phenomena* or *the essence of the teachings* would also be possible renderings. This phrase may be either simply descriptive, or a place name, or the name of a meditative

stability; if either of the latter two, one might expect the marker *zhes bya ba*, but its absence is not conclusive.

- n.12 We followed D, J, Z, N: *phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas*; He: *phyogs bcu sangs rgyas*.
- n.13 We followed D, H, Z, He: *zhugs*; L, N, C: *bzhugs*.
- n.14 *thams cad rnam par mi rtog pa bstan pa*. We followed D, J, Z, H: *bstan*, while N, He read *brtan*. We translate *bstan pa* here as “display,” while Conze (using the Narthang Kangyur) uses “firm,” *brtan pa*.
- n.15 We followed D, J, Z, N: *mi'i*; C: *ma'i*.
- n.16 We followed D, J, Z, N: *'gro khyod kyis sgrol*. The Hemis manuscript presents a variant: *'gro ba rab tu sgrol*.
- n.17 We followed D, J, Z, N: *bslab par bya*; He: *brlab par bya*.
- n.18 The title given here at the end of the sūtra, like in most of the Kangyurs, is *'phags pa kun tu bzang po theg pa chen po'i mdo*, and differs from the main title at the beginning. The Hemis Kangyur mirrors the title at the beginning: *'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa kun tu bzang po theg pa chen po'i mdo*.

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for Sanskrit names and terms ·

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in the Sanskrit manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other Sanskrit manuscripts of the Kangyur or Tengyur.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionaries.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where Tibetan-Sanskrit relationship is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source Unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 aspiration

smon lam

སྨོན་ལམ།

praṇidhāna^{AD}

The aspirations and vows made by bodhisattvas especially concerning their future enlightenment, sometimes in the form of a prayer.

g.2 Blessed One

bcom ldan 'das

བཅོམ་ལྷན་འདས།

bhagavān ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In Buddhist literature, an epithet applied to buddhas, most often to Śākyamuni. The Sanskrit term generally means “possessing fortune,” but in specifically Buddhist contexts it implies that a buddha is in possession of six auspicious qualities (*bhaga*) associated with complete awakening. The Tibetan term—where *bcom* is said to refer to “subduing” the four *māras*, *ldan* to “possessing” the great qualities of buddhahood, and *'das* to “going beyond” *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*—possibly reflects the commentarial tradition where the Sanskrit *bhagavat* is interpreted, in addition, as “one who destroys the four *māras*.” This is achieved either by reading *bhagavat* as *bhagnavat* (“one who broke”), or by tracing the word *bhaga* to the root *√bhañj* (“to break”).

g.3 buddhafiield

sangs rgyas kyi zhing

སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཞིང་།

buddhakṣetra ^{AD}

A pure realm manifested by a buddha, or a bodhisattva.

g.4 display of the nonconceptuality of all phenomena

chos thams cad rnam par mi rtog pa bstan pa

ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་རྣམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པ་བསྟན་པ།

—

A meditative stability.

g.5 essence of Dharma

chos kyi snying po

ཆོས་ཀྱི་སྙིང་པོ།

dharmagarbha ^{AD}

In this text, possibly the name of a place in Magadha, possibly a meditative stability on the essence of reality.

g.6 ground

sa

ས།

bhūmi ^{AD}

A stage of realization on the bodhisattva path.

g.7 Magadha

ma ga dhA · ma ga ta

མ་ག་ཏྲ། · མ་ག་ཏ།

magadha ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

An ancient Indian kingdom that lay to the south of the Ganges River in what today is the state of Bihar. Magadha was the largest of the sixteen “great states” (*mahājanapada*) that flourished between the sixth and third centuries BCE in northern India. During the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, it was ruled by King Bimbisāra and was home to many of the most important Buddhist sites, including Bodh Gayā, Nālandā, and Rājagṛha. Its capital was initially Rājagṛha but was later moved to Pāṭaliputra (modern-day Patna) sometime after the reign of Bimbisāra's son, Ajātaśatru.

g.8 meditative stability

ting nge 'dzin

ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

samādhi ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

In a general sense, *samādhi* can describe a number of different meditative states. In the Mahāyāna literature, in particular in the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, we find extensive lists of different samādhis, numbering over one hundred.

In a more restricted sense, and when understood as a mental state, *samādhi* is defined as the one-pointedness of the mind (*cittaikāgratā*), the ability to remain on the same object over long periods of time. The *sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* commentary on the *Mahāvīyutpatti* explains the term *samādhi* as referring to the instrument through which mind and mental states “get collected,” i.e., it is by the force of samādhi that the continuum of mind and mental states becomes collected on a single point of reference without getting distracted.

g.9 Samantabhadra

kun tu bzang po

ཀུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ།

samantabhadra ^{AD}

The interlocutor of the present text, Samantabhadra is one of the eight principal bodhisattvas. He is known for embodying the conduct of bodhisattvas through his vast aspirations, offerings, and deeds for the benefit of beings.

g.10 world system

'jig rten

འཇིག་རྟེན།

loka ^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

The term lokadhātu refers to a single four continent world-system illumined by a sun and moon, with a Mount Meru at its center, an encircling ring of mountains at its periphery, with the various god realms above; thus including the desire, form and formless realms.

The term can also refer to groups of such world-systems in multiples of thousands. A universe of one thousand such world-systems is called a chiliocosm (*sāhasralokadhātu*, *stong gi 'jig rten gyi kham*s); one thousand such chiliocosms is called a dichiliocosm (*dvīsāhasralokadhātu*, *stong gnyis kyi 'jig rten gyi kham*s); and one thousand such dichiliocosms is called a trichiliocosm (*trisāhasralokadhātu*, *stong gsum gyi 'jig rten gyi kham*s). A trichiliocosm is the largest universe described in Buddhist cosmology.